

ONE Letter from Taizé

Special Issue 1992

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FEB 25 RECD

A Love, Source of Freedom

Translated into thirty-five languages, this LETTER FROM THE PHILIPPINES was written by Brother Roger for the European meeting of young people which brought together for six days, in Budapest, from 30 December 1991 to 4 January 1992, 75,000 young adults from all the countries of Eastern and Western Europe. This European meeting is a stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" animated by Taizé.

Why LETTER FROM THE PHILIPPINES?

Brother Roger went to the Philippines in February 1991 to animate, with several of his brothers, a gathering that brought together young people from all the regions of the country. It was followed, during the whole of 1991, by meetings of young people from the North to the South of the country, from Baguio City to Mindanao.

The LETTER FROM THE PHILIPPINES will be reflected on during the INTERCONTINENTAL MEETINGS OF YOUNG PEOPLE held in Taizé every week of the year 1992.

If you knew that God always comes to you...

The gift Christ has placed in your soul is so unique that you cannot run away.¹

Run away from what? From his love, that inexhaustible source of freedom.

If waves of disillusionment were to come breaking all around you, would you let this call rise up within you: "Enable me to welcome your love."

Receiving the love he always offers... That is a burning breath of the Gospel.

At the ends of the earth as well as right beside you, there are people who do not let this inner call die out.

And they are led to the furthest reaches of freedom. Out of love for what is entrusted to them, they prepare themselves to take on responsibilities.

They will be among those who ease the pain of the innocent, who alleviate the suffering of the least fortunate. They will dare to undertake a sharing, even with very few resources. They will take risks to support human freedoms.

Even in the dark night of peoples, there are those who keep alive the flickering flame.²

From humble prayer, they draw the freedom to resist harsh turmoil, their souls uplifted by hope.³

Their life speaks to us and also questions us: where do they get such freedom?

1 During the meetings in the Philippines, one question kept coming up: how can we leave discouragement behind, leave hopelessness behind? Where can we find a source of life that will enable us to keep going? Many young Filipinos are experiencing economic difficulties and unemployment. But they have unique gifts—hearts filled with trust, and trust in the living God. Many of them are attentive to others, especially to the very poor. They are aware that prayer, far from making us passive, leads us to take on responsibilities for the building up of the human family, and to do this with great personal selflessness.

2 Jesus assures us that "I am..." but also "You are the light of the world" (John 8,12 and Matt 5,14).

3 If we only knew how much, in common prayer (or in solitude, too), singing awakens us to freedom, and sustains this freedom! Common prayer can allow us to contemplate the presence of the Risen Christ particularly through the beauty of the prayers and hymns that are sung.

By singing a prayer, a child can support all the generations. It would be wonderful if, in the churches, one or more children were to sing a prayer, taking turns with adults.

Churches can be made welcoming with very little: small candles, icons, a few pieces of cloth, an old carpet to kneel or sit on...

The violinist Yehudi Menuhin wrote: "When words are sung, they penetrate to the depths of our soul. I am convinced that the young people who stay away from the churches today would flock to them if they found there the mystery that should prevail."

To go forward with them on this road, does your trust in the Risen Christ seem too fragile to you?

Sometimes you think you have left him, but in you he is present, and he never abandons you. That is what is so unexpected about the Gospel.

Are not all of us God's poor, fragile in human eyes? And yet God chooses us to entrust to us a mystery of hope.⁴

So many young people, victims of doubt, are unable to place their trust in Christ, having been abandoned by those to whom God entrusted them from birth.

In their childhood, an abyss opened up in them and they cannot fill it. It is as if they wanted to run and keep running to find a chance in life, a mother, a father.

When their heart is in agony, when their depths cry out in loneliness and the ultimate question rises from deep within them, "But where is God?", who will find a way of telling them that, for God, "every human being is sacred, consecrated, by the wounded innocence of their childhood?"

Remember: if in you there seem to be dark holes of unbelief, you are not without faithfulness for all that.⁵

No longer look upon yourself as parched ground... Let his dew fall, tears of the morning, and in the desert of your soul is quenched the thirst for a love.⁶

You aspire to follow Christ to your dying breath, so know that, in making human beings in his image, God took the risk of creating them free, and never servile like robots.

Freedom bears a name burdened with a heavy weight of history.

It is useless to feign blindness. How many contradictory meanings have been given to freedom! What abuses of trust have been committed in its name!

What kind of freedom would it be if, in order to serve self-centred ends, it infringed upon the freedom of others?⁷

The important thing is the source from which freedom is acquired.⁸

This freedom is not gained once and for all.⁹ It is reawakened by a vigilance by which we go to the well-

4 We remain Christ's poor our whole lives long, since it is so true that we are never people who have "made it." Nobody is able to understand everything of the mystery of the faith. Everyone can say to themselves: in this unique communion which is the Church, others understand and live what I do not understand. I do not count only on my own faith but, in the steps of all Christ's witnesses, from the Virgin Mary and the apostles down to the Christians of today, I can pray: "Christ Jesus, enable me to dispose myself inwardly to place my trust in the Mystery of Faith."

Some people come to understand the realities of God by a gradual process; others, like the apostle Paul, grasp these realities through a sudden flash of insight.

For different reasons, some find themselves in situations where they do not receive the Eucharist. For centuries, therefore, people have remembered the multiplication of the loaves: one day, Christ blessed five loaves of bread to distribute to the crowd, to all without distinction. This gesture of hospitality mentioned in the Gospel (Mark 6,30-44) was translated, first in the Churches of the East, then in the West, by a gesture expressing the motherly love of the Church: offering blessed bread to all.

5 During his earthly life, Jesus himself heard a man say to him: "I believe; I trust." But this believer added immediately: "Come and help my unbelief, my doubt" (Mark 9,24). And when Christ was no longer on earth, the apostle Peter wrote to believers: "You love Christ although you have not seen him, and though you still do not see him, you believe" (1 Peter 1,8).

6 To express his presence in each person, Christ uses an expression hard to grasp: "You in me and I in you" (John 14,20). Perhaps it takes a long time to understand this reality. Four centuries after Christ, an African Christian wrote: "Christ is within you; that is his dwelling. Offer him your prayer but do not shout as if he were far from you. He is in the depths of your being" (St Augustine). The Risen Christ lives in us, but he is also beside us; he always walks alongside us. He is both the one we are seeking and the one who enables us to find him.

7 Even in the guise of loving someone, it is possible to abuse their freedom, for example by going to the point of imprisoning them by a kind of blackmail of the affections.

8 "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3,17).

9 "Christ has set us free so that we may remain free" (see Gal 5,1 and 13).

10 1 Cor 13,2-3

11 To welcome God's love, is it necessary to keep thinking about God? God is familiar with the infinite resources of the human heart, the depths where Christ dwells in silence. He knows that some people have a clear perception of the presence of the Risen Lord, while others sense nothing, or almost nothing. Seven hundred years ago, a Christian from the Rhineland, called Meister Eckhart, wrote:

"To turn to God...does not mean to keep thinking about God. That would be impossible...and in addition, it would not be the best thing. Human beings cannot be satisfied with a God who is the object of thought. For then, when the thought vanished, God would vanish too... God is beyond all human thoughts. And the reality of God never disappears."

12 Vaclav Havel wrote in a recent book: "If we do not try together to rediscover and to cultivate what I call superior responsibility, things will go ill for our country... The return to freedom in a society in an advanced state of moral decay has brought about the revelation of the worst forms of human behavior, as if all the negative sides of the human being had gained full freedom to blossom. The sentiment of a responsibility freely accepted by society is still not felt... I will never stop speaking tirelessly about responsibilities and morality; I consider that there is no reason to believe that this struggle is lost in advance. Only one struggle is surely lost in advance—the one we have given up... True politics, the only kind I consent to practice, is politics at the service of one's neighbour, at the service of the community, at the service of future generations. It simply means making a reality responsibility of all and towards all. It is nourished by the certainty, conscious or unconscious, that nothing is ended by death, since everything is written down for ever, everything is evaluated elsewhere, somewhere above us, in that indissociable part of the mysterious order of the cosmos, of nature and of life, that believers call God and to whose judgment everything is subject" ("Summer Meditations," ch. 5).

13 Jesus' words to that young man (Mark 10,17-22) question us and stimulate us to go far. In years to come, to make sharing possible, Christians may be led to a more visible simplicity: in daily life, in their homes. With great simplicity of heart and with very few material resources, it is possible to show a hospitality one did not believe oneself capable of. But it remains true that simplicity devoid of burning charity would be like a shadow without light.

14 Luke 1,38

15 Wonder is a tricky word to use. It could suggest a kind of inner "high," a forced and unreal attitude. A gift of God, wonder builds us up within. There is nothing simplistic about it.

16 Before his death, Jesus told his disciples that he was going away but that his presence would continue through the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit would be a comforter. Jesus knows that human beings need to be supported, sustained and also comforted (John 14,25-26; 16,5-7).

17 Luke 9,62

spring of the Risen Christ and live a life rooted in his love.

One of the first witnesses of the Gospel wrote these stupefying words: "If I had all knowledge and the fullness of faith, but have no love, I am nothing. If I were to give all I possess to the hungry, and surrender my body to the flames, without love it is useless."¹⁰

Welcoming his love...¹¹ and you are free to take on responsibilities,¹² free even to give your life.

Through the Gospel, you know that young man who, searching in God for the will of his love, came to Christ with his questions. One day Jesus replied to him, "You are lacking one thing. Sell what you have, give it to the poor, then come, follow me." And the young man went away sad.¹³

Why did he go away? Because he had many possessions. He wanted both to follow Christ and to keep his wealth. He did not have the freedom to give, out of love, even his own possessions.

It is human nature to wish to have everything. But anyone who wants everything teeters on the brink of impossibility; and nothing vast, nothing lasting can be accomplished then.

The young man in the Gospel was invited to make a choice of freedom. But so often, in the presence of the call to give even one's life for love, it happens that the yes and the no clash.

The yes fascinates; and at the same time that yes is frightening.

Will hesitations keep you at a standstill when confronted with eternity's yes, that yes which was already spoken by Mary?¹⁴

Let the day come for a resolution with no turning back. There comes a time when there is no other way out than a response of freedom, casting oneself upon God as into an abyss.

And then comes wonder.¹⁵ This abyss is God. It is not an abyss of darkness, but a chasm radiant with the brightness of the Risen Lord.

And already the Holy Spirit has brought you from doubt towards hope.¹⁶

As you walk in the footsteps of Christ by means of

eternity's yes, do not be surprised at his words, "Whoever has put their hand to the plow cannot look back."¹⁷

He is not calling you to shut your eyes to the light of God that comes at every moment to illuminate your life. He invites you to leave behind bitterness, revolt, all the inner darkness that corrodes, and can even destroy, eternity's yes.

So you will often be led to pray: "Jesus the Christ, do not let my darkness speak to me."¹⁸

Throughout this century, a decline of faith has spread across vast regions of the world. A void has been created where countless currents of religiosity have sprung up, of the most variegated kinds.¹⁹

In the face of this decline of faith, a sense of responsibility keeps us alert. Preparing the ways of Christ becomes one of the priorities.²⁰

Today, many young people have a great thirst for authenticity in the trusting of faith. Why be surprised that they are disconcerted by the inconsistency represented by the divisions between those who profess the same love of the Risen Christ?

In order to communicate Christ, is there a more transparent reality than the gift of a life whereby, day after day, reconciliation is lived out in concrete events?²¹

It is so essential to remember that Christ did not come to start one more religion, but to offer a communion in himself. And when that unique communion which is the Body of Christ, his Church, takes the risk of reconciliations, such a Gospel brightness does not deceive. It speaks by itself.

In the middle of the twentieth century there appeared a man named John XXIII. He had a rare intuition concerning the reconciliation of Christians. He expressed it by this affirmation: "We will not put history on trial; we will not attempt to find out who was wrong and who was right; we will simply say: let us be reconciled!"²²

All who respond to such a call refuse to consider anyone an enemy.²³ Praying in the silence of their hearts, they find the freedom to forgive, and to go to the point of loving those who reject or mistreat them.

Forgiveness is a reality of love all the more exceptional since sometimes the memory of the past cannot be wiped away. It can happen that the memory of humili-

18 St Augustine, *Confessions*.

19 These currents of religiosity are sometimes tinged with the esoteric. A woman from Prague, very active in the changes taking place in her country, the mother and grandmother of many children, wrote after much reflection: "So many young people are captivated by ideas and groups claiming to have an explanation for everything. How can we help them to believe in the invisible, in the impossible, in the love of God? How can we help them to be aware, with wonder, of signs of God's presence?"

20 The decline of faith is a characteristic of vast regions of the Northern hemisphere. Sometimes grandparents prepare the ways of Christ for the young. In Taizé, young people from one of the Baltic countries said, "If we have become believers, it is because of our grandmothers, and we would have liked to bring them with us to Taizé. Most of our grandmothers were sent away from their land for many years—fifteen years, seventeen years. Over there, in order to survive, all they had was trust in God. They are simple women. They did not understand the reason for so much suffering. Some have come back; they are transparent and without bitterness. For us now, our grandmothers are saints."

21 It is essential for young people to form small Christian communities of five or six persons. The first ones were created years ago in Haiti. To be attentive to Christ in his communion, and also so that there may be no segregation by age, it is important for these small communities of young adults to be linked to local communities, to parishes and congregations, where all the generations are present, from the elderly to little children.

22 John XXIII pronounced these words in a message on 29 January 1959. He was speaking of reconciliation among Christians.

23 In the seventh century, a Christian from the East wrote: "Do not listen to suspicions concerning anyone, even when expressed by other persons; they will cause you to stumble. Those who make a scandal out of events, whether intentionally caused or occurring by chance, do not know the way of peace, that road which leads through charity to the knowledge of God" (St Maximus Confessor).

24 Reconciliation is a healing. It involves forgiveness, offered or requested, and forgiveness frees the memory of its burden of guilt and anguish.

25 The "pilgrimage of trust on earth" animated by Taizé for years now does not organize young people into a movement centred on Taizé but stimulates them to become creators of peace, bearers of trust, in their towns and villages, in their parishes, with all the generations, from children to the elderly. Everyone can turn their life into a pilgrimage of trust... by praying... by trying to understand those who are far away because of their backgrounds, their choices... by undertaking gestures of reconciliation in one's own situation... by communicating to others a fine human hope...

6 Christians who are reconciled will always be an irreplaceable ferment to build up the human family across the earth.

7 It is important that those who have a responsibility for children never let them think that God places a torment in human beings. Often, already in early childhood, the heart is inhabited by a secret fear: God is going to punish me. The thought that God punishes is one of the greatest obstacles to faith. When God is viewed as a tyrannical judge, John reminds us in letters of fire: "God is love. We did not love God; God loved us first" (1 John 4). It is so essential never to let a fear in the name of God enter a child's heart.

8 Rev 2,9

9 In the freedom of a sharing with Christ, with unequalled simplicity, we can entrust our burdens to him. Humble prayer is within everyone's reach. In praying, God asks neither for extraordinary feats nor for superhuman efforts. Many believers have been sustained by a prayer quite poor in words. The apostle Paul wrote: "We do not know how to pray..." And he added: "... but the Holy Spirit comes to our assistance and prays in us" (Rom 8,26).

Some people need many words to pray. But is it not better to speak them when we are alone? Expressed before others, will they not oblige them to listen to what was meant for God alone? No one wishes to burden others with a prayer that could become chatter. When Paul invites us to "pray without ceasing," that does not only mean a prayer expressed in words. There is so much more to praying! It can be expressed in so many ways—gestures like the sign of the cross, symbols like that of the disciples who, at the end of St Luke's Gospel, bow down, their faces to the ground. Praying with our foreheads touching the ground expresses the deep desire to renew at every moment the gift of our life. Sometimes prayer is inner struggle. Sometimes it is simply abandoning our whole being to God in silence, with no words.

Some people pray with just a few words, always the same ones. It can be a good idea to find for oneself a short prayer that expresses an inner call. Such a prayer can never become a method. But, in the most diverse moments of our day, this call takes us out of ourselves and leads us to the essential. Here are two suggestions:

Jesus, your light is shining within us,
let not my doubts and my darkness speak to me.
Jesus, your light is shining within us,
Make me able to welcome your love.

Bless us, Lord Christ, bless us and those you have entrusted to us. Keep us in the spirit of the Gospel: joy, simplicity and mercy.

tions and wounds remains and is even passed down from one generation to the next. Gospel forgiveness, however, goes beyond the memory.²⁴

As the century draws to an end, so many regions of the world are marked by divisions and violence.

Throughout the earth, vast numbers aspire as never before to be pacified, reconciled. With realism they do all they can to achieve freedom. They take on responsibilities for the building up of the human family.

However powerless we may be, one of the urgencies of the coming years will be to bring about reconciliation where there is the wound of hatred, close to us or far away;²⁵ yes, to do all in our power to prevent new fratricidal wars.²⁶

All who seek reconciliation, with a heart that is simple and burning with love, discover freedom as a fullness of inner life.

They are able to pass through even the most hardened situations like the water of a stream which, in the early springtime, makes its way through ground that is still frozen.

In humble prayer, you will also be able to say to Christ: "Free me from my fears!" And Christ comes to shed light even on the mystery of human suffering, opening us to an intimacy with God.

And one day you will understand that God does not cause inner distress or a fear in anyone.

Christ did not come to earth to inflict a punishment but so that every human being might be saved, reconciled, and discover that God is love, love alone.²⁷

God clothes us in limitless compassion, and so goes to the point of burying our past in the heart of Christ. The assurance of his forgiveness is the most unheard of, the most unbelievable of Gospel realities. It is freedom.

Will you hear Christ saying to you: "I am familiar with your trials and your poverty, yet you are filled to overflowing."²⁸

Filled by what? By his love, source of freedom, hidden in the depths of your being.²⁹

MESSAGES FOR THE EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUDAPEST

Pope John Paul II

Dear Brother Roger,

Informed of the European meeting of young people in Budapest, a stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" where you will continue to reflect with the young on the theme "inner life and human solidarities," the Holy Father expresses his encouragement to the participants.

Dear young people, in this gathering, you are already having the experience of going beyond linguistic, cultural and spiritual frontiers. A collective endeavor commits you personally as well. Listening to the Lord makes us open to the needs of our brothers and sisters who share our humanity. As for Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, Christ, present in the depths of our being, places his Spirit in you and sends you out on the roads of the world: "Go find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20,17). In silence and contemplation, the encounter with God, Trinity of love, makes each person a missionary of the Gospel.

During your times of sharing, be aware that you must allow yourselves to be reconciled with God in order to offer forgiveness to your brothers and sisters! May this pardon that you receive open the way to reconciliation between peoples, without which the Europe of the third millennium will not be able to forge its unity! At the dawn of the new year, your endeavor brings to birth the hope of a Europe determined to transcend the antagonisms that have torn it apart in the past.

The Pope wishes that your meeting may contribute to the building up of a Europe of peace, a Europe of faith, a Europe of hope, a Europe of love, in these days when we are celebrating the Incarnation of the Prince of peace. He invokes upon all who will take part in this gathering and upon those who will welcome them, as well as upon the community that is animating it, the graces and the blessing of God.

Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople:

With much joy and affection, we greet from this historic see the 14th European Youth Meeting organised by the beloved Community of Taizé.

Passing from the old to the coming new year, on the eve of the third millennium A.D., in an historic moment, but also a critical time for worldwide Christianity, this meeting of prayer and of spiritual enhancement into the sources of faith of thousands of youth from various countries coming together in the name of Christ to know each other is a most blessed and hope-bearing event for the new world about to be born.

This world of real and human understanding, for peaceful encounter and the solving of problems, this more human world, this world of love, is yours, my beloved youth. Build up this new world, so that human beings may live cherishing a greater respect towards their own self-worth and personality, because they were created in the image and likeness of God.

Beyond this new-born world of the XXIst century is the abundantly manifested love of God, who allowed humankind to be tempted and tried, but not "beyond its strength" (1 Cor.10:13).

Increase your faith, "love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22) and make your banner and your personal friend Jesus Christ,

The President of the Republic of Hungary, Mr Göncz Árpád

I greet the presence in our country of Brother Roger, brothers of the Taizé Community, and thousands and thousands of young people from all the countries of Europe.

Taizé is a flame of faith that burns for all, in a cold and dark world.

Taizé is a leaven of love in a world that is like a loaf of bread that has not risen well.

May that flame grow, so that shivering human beings can warm themselves in its heat!

May that leaven transform our world so that it may become bread of charity.

May God's blessing go with you in your work!

On the final day of the meeting, the Prime Minister, Mr Antall József, also sent a letter to Brother Roger in order to greet the young people as they were leaving.

From the Secretary General of the United Nations:

Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, contacted by telephone in New York, wished to say that he greeted Brother Roger, the brothers of the community, the tens of thousands of young people from all the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, and the young people from other continents gathered together for the European meeting of young people in Budapest.

Coming to the end of his term of office, Javer Perez de Cuellar thanks the young people for having supported him by their prayer these past years. He assures them that their work for peace and reconciliation, their "pilgrimage of trust on earth," are and will continue to be a support for the United Nations.

who "came that we may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10,10).

"God is love" (1 John 4:16)

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey:

On this occasion of the European Taizé Meeting for Young Adults I send my warmest greetings and the assurance of my prayers.

Taizé has become the symbol of the breaking down of barriers between nations and churches. It has become a symbol too of common prayer across international boundaries for young people. In this coming year I intend to join that ever increasing number of pilgrims and to bring with me to Taizé one thousand young Anglicans. We shall, I know, be much enriched by our worship and study together.

You too in the coming days will discover anew the bonds which unite Christian people across the world. It is so encouraging that once again you will meet in a great city of central Europe to celebrate the building of a new continent together in this time of renewed hope.

May God bless you in your study, your prayer and your celebration together and may you bring further encouragement to the people of Budapest as you receive the generosity and warmth of their hospitality.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the one thousand young Anglicans will be in Taizé for the week of 23 to 30 August 1992.

The Taizé Community possesses no capital and accepts no donations, no legacies from family or any other source, absolutely nothing. Its sole source of income is what it produces by its work.

Through its work, the community has to support a large part of the expenses caused by welcoming young people, construction and repair of buildings, etc.

On the other hand, **"Operation Hope"** has two requirements which are in need of contributions:

1. for the travel expenses of young people from the Southern continents and from Eastern Europe. There are more and more who wish to take part in the meetings in Taizé but do not have the means of paying for the journey (in three years, the number of young people in Taizé has almost doubled).

2. for young people in certain poor regions of Europe who are in great material need in their daily lives.

Contributions can be sent to:

UK: "Operation Hope", Bank Account no. 4495090, Coutts and Co., Duncannon Branch, 440 Strand, LONDON WC2R 0QS

USA: "OPERATION HOPE", c/o Taizé, 413 W. 48th St., New York NY 10036

IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA, etc.: contributions may be sent in the same way as sums for subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope".

The next stage of the Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth:

North American Meeting for Young Adults in

Dayton, Ohio, USA.

21-25 May 1992

Letter from Taizé

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MEDITATING ON THE WORD

MARCH

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

JOHANNINE HOURS

JOHN 4,5-15

1 SUN 1 Co 15.54-58 Lk 9.39-45
Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.

2 MON 1 P 3.13-17 Mk 11.15-19
Proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts and always be ready to answer people who ask you the reason for the hope you have.

3 TUE Mk 11.20-25 1 P 4.1-6
Jesus said: When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins too.

4 ASH WEDNESDAY 2 Co 5.20-6.2 Jl 2.12-18 Mt 6.1-6/16-18
We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

5 THU Jl 1.4-12 Lk 9.22-25
The Lord said to Jeremiah: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you and consecrated you.

6 FRI Is 58.5-9a Mt 9.14-17
Thus says the Lord: Is that the sort of fast that pleases me: hanging your head like a bended reed? Is not rather this the fast that pleases me: breaking unjust fetters, setting free the oppressed and sharing your food with the hungry?

7 SAT Lk 5.27-32 Is 58.9b-12
Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

8 SUN Lk 4.1-13 Dt 26.4-10
Jesus said to the tempter: It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, him alone must you serve."

9 MON Mt 25.34-40 Jl 4.1-4
Jesus said: In truth I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

10 TUE Mt 6.7-14 Is 55.10-11
Jesus said: Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

11 WED Lk 8.19-21 Jl 2.1-7
Jesus said: My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.

12 THU Mt 7.7-11 Jl 2.10-13
Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

13 FRI Ezk 18.27-32 Mt 5.23-24
The Lord says: I take no pleasure in the death of anyone. Turn to me and live!

14 SAT Dt 30.11-14 Mt 5.43-48
The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

15 SUN Lk 9.28-36 Ph 3.17-4.1
Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed. Then a cloud enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud saying: This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him.

16 MON Jl 3.12-17 Lk 6.36-38
The Lord says to his people: Return to me; for I am merciful.

17 TUE Is 1.16-18 Mt 20.20-28
The Lord says: Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

18 WED Jl 14.7-9 Lk 15.11-24
You are our hope, Lord; why is it that you are like a stranger in this land? Yet you are among us and we are called by your name.

19 SAT Ws 10.9-12 Lk 15.25-32
St JOSEPH The Wisdom of God led the upright along straight paths and showed them the realities of the kingdom of God.

20 FRI Mt 7.14-16 Mt 21.33-43
The flock you chose, Lord, lives confined in a forest with meadow land all around: shepherd your people and lead them to pasture.

21 SAT Mi 7.18-20 Mt 18.19-22
What God can compare with you, Lord, for pardoning sin and overlooking transgression? You will again have compassion on us, treading our sins underfoot.

22 SUN Jn 4.5-14 Ex 17.1-7
Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: If you only knew what God is offering and who it is who is saying to you, "Give me something to drink", you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.

23 MON Jl 29.11-14 Jn 4.14-26
The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans for peace not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. When you seek me, you shall find me, for you will seek me with all your heart.

24 TUE Jl 17.7-10 Jn 4.27-42
Blessed are they who put their trust in the Lord. Such a person is like a tree planted by the water: in a year of drought it is untroubled and never ceases to bear fruit.

25 WED Lk 1.26-38 Is 7.10-15
Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.

26 THU Jl 7.23-26 Jn 4.43-54
The Lord says: Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you will be my people. In everything, follow the way that I will mark out for your happiness.

27 FRI Hos 14.2-5a Mk 12.28-34
The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart.

28 SAT Hos 6.3-6 Lk 18.9-14
Let us strive to know the Lord; that he will come as certain as the dawn. He will come to us like the rain of springtime upon the earth.

29 SUN Mi 7.7-9 Jn 9.1-12
My hope is in the God who will save me. Though I lie in darkness, the Lord is my light.

30 MON Is 65.17-19 Jn 9.13-17
The Lord says: See, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. Be filled with rejoicing for ever, for I am creating my people to be gladness.

31 TUE Jl 20.7-9 Jn 9.18-34
Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain. April

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

In a simple meeting beside a well, Jesus reveals fully his mission and his identity. According to all the criteria of the surrounding society, the woman who comes to draw water is not a fit person for Jesus to be with. In the first place she is a Samaritan, member of a group that for centuries was the hereditary rival of the Jews. Second, she is a woman: her place is not to converse with a rabbi nor even to speak to a strange man (cf. 4.27). In addition, she is probably someone with a bad reputation, a "sinner": she goes out at noon, an hour when she is fairly sure not to meet anybody on the road.

Without hesitating in the least, Jesus enters into a relationship with this undervalued person. By expressing his simple human desire to drink, he shows his esteem for the woman, treating her as an equal or even as someone in a position of superiority, since she has what he needs. Her human dignity is thus fully restored and the foundations of a communion established beyond the boundaries of convention.

This communion is not, however, rooted in a human act of kindness. Although Jesus first appeals to the woman's good will, to the generosity of her heart, this is only a first step towards helping her realize that the most important thing is to receive. He reveals a God who is above all a Giver, an overflowing source of life, and himself as the only one able to make this source well up. The encounter with Jesus and his request to drink lead the woman to discover her own thirst and open in her a void that God alone can fill.

- How can we, through simple gestures, create signs of communion that go beyond the barriers of society to respect fully the dignity of others?
- What helps me open myself to the gift of God, to remember that God only asks something of me in order to give me still more?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

APRIL

JOHANNINE HOURS

JONAH 1-2

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 WED Is 49.8-10 Jn 9.35-39
The Lord says: My people will not go hungry or thirsty, they will not be scorched by the heat of the desert, for the one who has compassion on them will be with them, guiding them to springs of water.

2 THU Jn 7.1-18 Jn 12.1-3
Jesus said: My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. If anyone is prepared to do God's will they will discover whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

3 FRI Jn 7.25-30 Ws 2.12-20
Jesus said: I am not here on my own, but the one who sent me is true. I know him because I am from him and he sent me.

4 SAT Jn 31.31-34 Jn 7.37-39
The Lord says: I shall put my law deep within them, I shall write it on their hearts. I shall be their God and they will be my people.

5 SUN Jn 11.1-45 2 K 4.18-37
Jesus said to Martha: I am the resurrection. The one who believes in me shall live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

6 MON Jn 8.1-11 Is 42.1-4
Jesus said to the woman who had been brought before him: "Where are those who were accusing you? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir", she said. "Neither do I condemn you", said Jesus, "Go, and sin no more."

7 TUE Is 42.5-7 Jn 8.25-30
The Lord says to his servant: I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and shape you. I will make you a light to the nations.

8 WED Is 49.1-6 Jn 8.31-36
The Lord says to his servant: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.

9 THU Is 50.8-10 Jn 8.51-59
The Lord is coming to my help. Who then can condemn me?

10 FRI Is 53.1-5 Jn 10.31-39
The servant of the Lord bore our suffering. We have been healed by his wounds.

11 SAT Ezk 37.26-28 Jn 11.49-56
The Lord says: I shall make a covenant of peace with my people, and it will be an eternal covenant. I shall set my sanctuary among them for ever.

12 PALM SUNDAY Lk 19.28-40 Is 50.4-7
The crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: Blessed is the one who comes as king in the name of the Lord!

13 MON Mt 26.30-46 Mt 26.47-56
Jesus said to his disciples: Stay awake, and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but human nature is weak.

14 TUE Mk 14.32-52 Mk 14.53-72
At Gethsemane, Jesus prayed saying: Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will.

15 WED Lk 23.26-46 Lk 23.1-12
The criminal said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

16 THU Jn 13.1-15 Lk 22.7-23 1 Co 11.23-26
Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, now loved them to the end.

17 GOOD FRIDAY Jn 19.1-37 Jn 18.28-40
Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and, carrying his own cross, he went out of the city to the place known as Golgotha where they crucified him.

18 SAT Jb 19.25-26 Mt 27.62-66
Job said: I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will take his stand upon the earth.

19 EASTER DAY Jn 20.1-18 Col 3.1-4
The Risen Christ said to Mary of Magdala: Go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.

20 MON Lk 24.33-48 Ac 2.14,22-28
Having recognized the Risen Christ, the disciples at Emmaus set out that moment and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven who said to them, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

21 TUE Mt 28.1-8 Ac 2.36-41
The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid: I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said he would."

22 WED Ac 3.1-10 Mt 28.9-20
Peter said to the crippled man, "I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"

23 THU Jn 20.19-23 Ac 3.11-21
The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

24 FRI Ac 4.1-12 Jn 21.4-14
Christ, the stone the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone.

25 MON Mk 16.15-20 Ac 4.13-21
St MARK Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

26 SUN Jn 20.24-31 Ac 5.12-16
Jesus said to Thomas: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

27 MON Ac 4.32-37 Jn 3.1-8
All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but they shared everything they had.

28 TUE Jn 3.7-15 Ac 5.27-33
Everyone who believes in Christ will have eternal life.

29 WED Jn 3.16-17 Ac 5.34-42
God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

30 THU Jn 3.18-21 Ac 7.51-8.1
Jesus said: Whoever acts according to the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he is doing is done in God.

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Unlike the other prophetic books, the book of Jonah is not a collection of oracles announced by a historical prophet but a consciously composed story that attempts to entertain and instruct. Even if "the gift Christ has placed in your soul is so unique that you cannot run away," it is also part of human nature to try and run away from responsibilities that seem too heavy. Jonah does this by boarding a ship heading for the other end of the world.

But running away from God means running away from one's own heart, and this can only lead to a dead-end, both for oneself and for others. Fortunately, even when forgotten, God remains present to bring the wanderer back to the truth of his or her existence. The author of the book shows with great imagination how God can use anything to lead human beings back to himself: non-believers (the pagan sailors are much more "religious" than the Israelite prophet!) and even the forces of nature (the storm and the "big fish," which evokes the sea monsters depicted in the ancient myths as the greatest opponents of God).

Jonah's disobedience seems to lead him to a death far from God. But this apparent calamity turns out in the end to be a direction the prophet has to take to get back on the right road. It is not surprising that the early Christians (and Jesus himself, cf. Matt 12,40) saw Jonah as a figure of Christ in his passover from death to the fullness of life.

- What can I do when I am tempted to run away from the responsibilities God entrusts to me?
- Has God used other persons and events to help me understand his call? Which ones?